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ABSTRACT

Designed primarily for beginning teachers in Missouri public schools, this pamphlet provides a checklist of practical, common sense pointers for classroom teaching. Material is provided on seven topics, including planning before opening day, opening day, the first weeks, yearlong objectives, assistance from the principal and administrators, 10 basics of teaching, and instructional management. Each of these topics is presented in a separate section, which is subdivided into specific recommendations on procedure and activities for developing and maintaining classroom control, student rapport, and good faculty and administration relations. A bibliography concludes the pamphlet. (LP)

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The Teacher's Checklist

A "Flight Plan" for Effective Teaching and Classroom Management

SP 022 537

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Arthur L. Mallory, Commissioner of Education
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Foreword

It's not easy being a schoolteacher today (not that it ever was!). While you are part of a team in your school and in your district, you are often "on your own" as you try to meet the needs of your students and the higher-than-ever expectations of parents and patrons.

While this booklet will probably be most helpful for beginning teachers, it includes many practical, common-sense reminders that should be useful for all classroom teachers. One is never so experienced as to not need reminding about "basics" once in a while. Even the most experienced pilot, for example, begins every flight by going over a basic checklist and making sure everything essential for a safe flight is in working order. A pilot, of course, can't afford to overlook "little things." A pilot also must have a precise flight plan before taking off, or he may end up a hundred miles from the intended destination.

This booklet resembles a pilot's preflight checklist. It also stresses the importance of having a "flight plan"—specific goals and objectives for your students, beginning with the first day of class.

As a teacher, you do not have the life-and-death responsibility that a pilot carries, but your responsibility to students is almost as great. As a teacher, you have a luxury that pilots often don't have: You can ask someone for help when you're having trouble. This booklet, for example, encourages you to take advantage of the experience and practical knowledge of "buddy teachers," veteran colleagues and your principal. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education also can provide assistance and resources that may not be available locally.

I hope you find this booklet useful.

Richard H. Wallace

Commissioner of Education

"Management is practice. Its essence is not knowing but doing. Its test is not logic but results. Its authority is performance."

—Peter Drucker

The Teacher's Checklist

The ideas and suggestions on the following pages are intended to help teachers—especially beginning teachers—throughout the school year. They were collected, reviewed and edited by a committee of Missouri teachers and administrators (see page 19). Successful professionals themselves, they have seen most of these "trade secrets" applied by master teachers. They have also seen instructors who struggled and failed, often because of their inability to master some of these basic principles.

Although you may have heard most of these tips during your training for teaching, they will probably seem more meaningful to you now, as you prepare for your first days in the classroom this year and plan the year's activities.

BEFORE OPENING DAY

Do Your Homework—Read your policy manual. Be acquainted with rules and procedures of the school: opening and closing hours, attendance policies, fire drill routines, evacuation procedures, cafeteria rules, etc. Be familiar with the building. Locate the exits, the principal's office, counselor's office, health room, library, etc. Some students may be lost the first day; you shouldn't be.

Get to Know Your Colleagues—The principal, other teachers, the librarian, the counselor, secretaries and custodians, and ancillary staff can answer your questions and help solve problems. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Prepare First-Day Plans and Materials—Know the instructional objectives for your school and for your grade or class. If the school does not have a set of instructional objectives for your grade or class, prepare your own. Review the curriculum guides and the textbook series you will be using. Make the first day a real day of school. Have definite plans for student assignments, and have the necessary materials available for students to use. A friendly but businesslike first day helps you establish control

of the classroom and gives students a feeling of security. Prepare written lesson plans for the first days. Even though you may not complete all the activities you anticipated, lesson plans will give you confidence and help you off to a smooth start.

Arrange the Furniture—You will probably change the seating arrangement frequently during the year, but start off with a fairly traditional setup and a temporary seating chart. This will help you learn each student's name and see how your room will "work" when the desks and tables are occupied.

Make the Room Attractive—Your personal touches (plants, bulletin boards, posters, etc.) will add warmth to a modern classroom or brighten an older, darker room.

THE FIRST DAY

Arrive Early—Have time to greet your colleagues and students who arrive early. You should be in your room before students arrive. Although you may be apprehensive about the first day, being early so you have time to look over your plans and get needed materials will be helpful. Relax, unpack your smile, and get ready to meet your class.

Greet Students with a Smile—A pleasant "Good morning" is probably sufficient. You will have time to get acquainted later. Have your name on the chalkboard so students can learn to pronounce and spell it immediately.

Insist that Students Be Seated When They Arrive—Pencils can be sharpened, summer adventures recounted, and questions answered later. You need to establish a good working climate as soon as possible.

Review Your Main Tasks—Especially during the first few days, you need to establish a well-disciplined classroom in which you have

the attention of students, help them establish good work habits, and work with groups as well as individuals.

Check Attendance—Have students raise their hands as you call each name. This helps you associate names and faces and helps the students become acquainted with each other.

Carry Out Lessons Previously Planned—You can keep beginning exercises brief and pleasant, but get the routine of the day started. Since many students know the back-to-school routine, they don't need the whole first day to "adjust." They should be able to report worthwhile learning experiences when they go home after their first day in your class.

THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

Let Students Know What to Expect—During the first few days, tell students what your instructional objectives are and what minimum standards you expect them to achieve. You will want to provide a written list of your instructional objectives for students and parents.

Develop Room Standards—This point cannot be emphasized too strongly. Although you may not want students to think of you immediately as being "mean" or "too strict," you must be in charge. Establish control of your room first; you can relax gradually as students become better acquainted with you and are able to accept more responsibility. You should try to keep classroom rules and regulations to a minimum, but there must be rules! Many teachers find it constructive to let students help write the rules themselves. This gives them a stake in maintaining a wholesome classroom environment.

You will want to establish sensible routines for getting books and materials, sharpening pencils, leaving the room, talking during class,

etc. Unless organized and supervised, these "trivial" matters can quickly consume valuable teaching time. Except for those times when the class is involved in a planned activity, you probably will want to allow only one or two students at a time to be out of their seats. You will also want to discuss with students the need for courtesy; laughing *with* others, not at them; acceptable ways of working and playing; the need for completing assignments on time, etc.

Again, you must maintain good control of your classroom. After the first few weeks, you may choose to be less formal. If you fail to establish your authority at the outset, however, you may never regain it.

Study the Records of Your Students—You will get to know your students quickly through personal observation, but you need to know more about their characteristics, achievements, capabilities and problems. School records and reports from other teachers can be most helpful.

Remember that students' records are confidential and that parents can see—or challenge—anything you enter into a student's permanent file. Check with your principal or counselor about evaluation and diagnostic data and instruments which are available. Use all such information objectively. Don't accept subjective reports and anecdotal information about students unquestioningly. Remember that previous achievement information may not reflect the true ability of the student, so expect all students to be able to accomplish at least the minimum objectives for your class.

Work With Parents—Take advantage of every opportunity to meet with parents. Remember that parents are forming impressions of you based on what they hear from their children, just as you will form impressions about parents based on what you learn from the students! Try to make sure parents understand your goals and expectations for students. Don't let your first contact with parents be in connection with a negative incident. Respond to

parents' questions quickly and honestly. Suggest ways they can help at home with students' assignments. Be sensitive to the needs of children (and parents!) from one-parent families. Parent involvement may be time-consuming, but it can promote higher achievement.

Begin Some Interesting, Worthwhile Activities Early—Students enjoy out-of-the-ordinary projects and activities. Special activities can be fun and related constructively to your objectives, but don't let them overshadow your primary lessons and assignments. Well-planned activities can motivate students, provide extra challenge for advanced students and promote cooperative relationships among students.

Record Plenty of Observations and Grades—One of your hardest tasks is assigning grades. Make sure you have enough information to assess each student's ability and effort fairly. Keep a folder for each student. Remember that you don't have to grade every piece of work you collect from students. Written assignments and test performance can provide valuable evidence of a student's progress.

Be Prepared—There is no substitute for preparation. There are no firm rules about how much time you need to spend out-of-class and at home preparing lesson plans and activities, but some "midnight oil" is probably inevitable. You will undoubtedly have a few advanced students and a few below-average students. Try to think of ways to work with them in advance, so they aren't left out and don't monopolize your attention in class.

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

The same tips that will help you get off to a smooth start will stand you in good stead throughout the year. Here are some additional pointers:

Expect Good Work from Each Student—Your expectations—both explicit and unspoken—are powerful influences on students and are probably self-fulfilling. Expect each student to do his or her best—whatever that level may be.

Give Praise for Good Work and Good Behavior—Positive reinforcement is a strong motivator. It's definitely more constructive and more pleasant—for you and the students—when you find good things to say about their behavior and performance.

Be Firm but Fair—Reasonable rules must be enforced consistently. Remember that consistency is not synonymous with fairness.

Be Patient—All students won't progress at the same rate, of course. Some students, inevitably, will tax your patience and understanding, but they will usually respond positively if you continue providing help and encouragement. Maintain your standards and expectations, but realize that you may have to help some students find success in out-of-the-ordinary ways.

Be Calm—Agitation and frustration are contagious. Your demeanor is the key to a calm, productive classroom. If students discover that you can be "rattled" easily, some will inevitably try to exploit that vulnerability.

Plan Your Work Carefully—This will help you vary activities and maintain a steady pace in the classroom. Planning will prevent you from straying from your objectives and will help students see the purposefulness of their assignments.

Ask Questions, Accept Suggestions—You will quickly learn who the most respected, most effective teachers are in your building. Watch them and learn from them. There are usually good reasons for things being done a certain way

in your building; don't break the status quo unnecessarily. If you have a problem or sense frustration among your students, ask for help. You may be overlooking the obvious; others will have dealt with the same problem before.

Be Prompt with Clerical Work—You expect students to complete their assignments on time; don't fall behind in your own work. Refrain from doing your clerical work in class; class time belongs to your students.

Be a Good Manager—Many of the previous suggestions deal with methods for maintaining and managing an orderly classroom, *but your ultimate responsibility is to manage learning*. When you are working with 25-30 students, for example, and the range of students' abilities may be as great as five grade levels, you *must* be an active manager.

The first step, of course, is to "get your books"—to have instructional objectives formulated; to be thoroughly familiar with the material you're teaching; to anticipate students' questions; to know what you want to achieve with every lesson.

The key to managing instruction effectively (and continuously) is a set of specific instructional goals, which provides an understandable framework for you, the students and their parents. (You'll notice that several suggestions in this booklet emphasize the importance of defining your goals and expectations for students and parents.) Such goals define the teaching/learning process in terms you can measure and discuss without too much jargon.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education encourages every school to have its own "instructional management system"—a method of applying the concepts of mastery learning. This approach encourages greater coordination within grades and subjects; it also provides for better grade-to-grade articulation.

See page 16 for a brief description of an instructional management system.

Keep a Sense of Humor—You don't have to entertain students or win a popularity contest, but keep smiling. You'll have bad days, of course, but a light touch will help you and your students get over the rough spots without lingering tension. You're in charge, but you'll make mistakes. Don't take yourself too seriously.

Take Part in School Activities—This will help you get to know students, parents and colleagues outside the classroom context. Also, participate in professional activities in the school—in-service workshops, grade-level meetings, etc.

Look to the Principal for Leadership and Assistance

Especially if you're a beginning teacher or starting in a different school, you'll have plenty of questions. Here are some things to ask your principal about.

- Written policies and procedures of the board of education. (These are the ground rules for instruction, discipline, personnel matters, etc.)
- Educational goals and objectives of the district and the school.
- Curriculum guides used by the district for your subject area(s).
- Policies about distributing and accounting for textbooks.
- Any policies or restrictions concerning your use of supplemental or nonstandard instruction materials.
- Procedures for ordering materials and supplies.
- Materials and supplies students are expected to bring.
- Availability of special services—school nurse, counselor, psychologist, etc.
- Who your "buddy teacher" is and what kind of assistance you can expect from him or her.
- School and district policies and procedures concerning classroom discipline.
- When you should send problem students to the principal or the counselor.
- Procedures for, or restrictions on, students' use of the library.
- Evaluation procedures used by the school.
- Instruments used in the testing program and how test data are used.
- Procedures for reporting grades and other student achievement information to parents; schedules and procedures for formal and informal conferences with parents.
- Community resources available and appro-

priate for your subject area and procedures concerning their uses; procedures for field trips.

- District policies concerning community involvement, particularly utilization of volunteers.
- Records you are required to keep or file.
- Lunchroom and playground responsibilities and procedures.
- What to do in case of a student injury or illness.
- Emergency procedures and your duties in case of fire, tornado, earthquake, etc.
- What to do in case of personal illness or injury. (What will you be expected to provide for the substitute teacher, for example?)
- Policies concerning how and when you are to prepare and submit lesson plans.
- Your responsibility for collecting money from students (for charity, class projects, etc.).
- The budget for your building and your class
- Opportunities (and requirements) for in-service training and professional development.
- The school's professional library.
- Policies concerning visitors in your classroom—especially unscheduled ones (parents, relatives, friends, reporters, etc.).
- Guidelines for assigning homework.
- Retention/promotion policies.
- How your performance will be evaluated.
- Parent/teacher organizations and how you are expected to be involved.
- Regular publications of the school and district (internal and external newsletters, etc.) Are you expected to contribute news items? Also ask about policies concerning publicity for your classroom activities. Is there a contact person in your school or district who works with the news media?

10 "Basics" for Teachers

Intangible qualities such as personality, temperament and "style" may help determine a teacher's effectiveness, but there also are some characteristic things that successful teachers **do.** Recent research is helping to identify and describe specific "behaviors" of effective teachers who manage their classrooms well and help their students be successful. While research may never define the "art" of teaching, several recent studies have shown that the following factors contribute to improved academic achievement.

1. Not surprisingly, students tend to achieve more when teachers allocate more time to a particular content area. Moreover, achievement improves when teachers increase the amount of time students spend *actually engaged* in a learning activity. Thus, while it may not be possible to schedule more time for reading instruction, it may be possible to make better use of available time by reducing distractions and superfluous activities that cut into the amount of real "engaged" time. In short, it's not enough to allocate an hour for teaching reading; that hour must be used well.

2. Many students will fail—at least temporarily—at some tasks and activities. To prevent frustration and promote achievement, though, students should experience success much more often than failure in their learning tasks. Students who spend more time than average on "high success" activities will have higher achievement. This implies that teachers must watch students' progress carefully in order to assign learning tasks at which they can succeed more often than not.

3. Clearly stated instructional objectives—which are clearly understood by teachers, parents and students—contribute to improved achievement on those objectives. Clearly stated instructional goals also seem to improve students' motivation and home/school cooperation.

4. Evidence suggests that teachers who are able to diagnose students' skill levels accurately generally maintain higher "engagement" levels (see #1, page 13) in their classrooms.

5. Achievement tends to be higher when teachers provide sufficient supervised practice in new skills before expecting independent work. You may need to review previous lessons or slow down if students often ask for clarification or repeated instructions. Frequent requests for additional explanation are associated with lower achievement.

6. Frequently reminding students to "get back to work" when they are not paying attention or not concentrating is usually ineffective. Students are most likely to be "off task" because their assignments are too difficult or not clearly understood.

7. Encouraging constructive activities is more than just a preferable alternative to coping with disruptive behavior; it encourages higher achievement.

8. Teachers should frequently let students know how they are doing—in specific terms. The amount of feedback from the teacher is positively related to students' "engagement" rate and to achievement; more feedback tends to produce greater engagement and achievement. For instance, students who receive more small-group instruction have higher engagement rates than those who spend most of their time in independent seat work, having little direct interaction with the teacher or other students.

9. Students who work together to reach academic goals—and take responsibility for achieving them—tend to achieve at higher levels.

10. Teachers' expectations for students and commitment to basic skills are both closely related to student achievement. In other words,

teachers must believe that students (despite their social or economic status) can achieve, and they must accept responsibility for helping students learn.

These suggestions are based on conclusions of the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES) and of Dr. Ronald Edmonds, Harvard Graduate School of Education, who has studied the characteristics of "successful schools." Many professional journals have summarized this research recently and are reporting the findings of other studies that provide practical information about the traits of effective schools and teachers.

The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, started in 1972, was conducted by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Develment for the California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing. The Commission publishes a newsletter as well as technical reports about the study. For more information, write: BTES, Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing, 1020 'O Street, Sacramento, California 95814.

A Teacher's Guide to Managing Instruction

An instructional management system (IMS) is a practical method for organizing the teaching/learning process. A management system for teaching describes the total process of establishing learning objectives; planning appropriate learning activities for students based on the objectives; recording students' progress; reporting that progress in specific terms; and providing feedback so the system can be modified and improved where necessary. The IMS concept is based on two fundamental premises:

1. **All** students can learn at a satisfactory level if teachers believe they can and if the school is organized to provide the time each student needs to learn.
2. For students to be self-motivated, they must spend more than half of their time working on tasks at which they experience a high degree of success. Because all students learn at different rates, this means each student should have school work presented to him at a rate no faster than he can master. **Learning deficits should not be allowed to accumulate.**

These two principles—varying time rather than achievement and individualizing to the extent that each student experiences more success than failure—introduce so many variables that a management system is essential for organizing instructional activities and handling information about students' progress.

Most school districts have some of the parts of an instructional management system in operation, and some districts exhibit most of the essential characteristics of an IMS. If your school does not have some type of IMS, though, you may wish to develop one for your own classroom.

1. A teacher who is committed to following an IMS in his/her **classroom** will have the following conditions prevail:

- The teacher will know exactly what skills and knowledge his or her students are expected to learn in one or more subjects.

- The teacher will have determined mastery criteria for each objective.
- The teacher will record and report pupil progress in terms of learning objectives mastered by individual students.
- The teacher will assess learning resources available for each objective and will base requests for additional resources on areas of need and learning modes of students.

2. In a **school building** with a well-planned IMS, one would find each of the teachers exhibiting the characteristics above, plus the following:

- Learning objectives for one or more subjects would be articulated from grade to grade or from class to class to provide for appropriate, continuous progress for each student.
- Supervisory visits would be focused upon student performance on specific objectives. The supervisor would be a resource to help the teacher improve in the skills or techniques needed to enable the students to master the objectives.

3. A **school district** which utilizes an IMS for one or more subjects will have all of the foregoing characteristics, plus the following:

- The central office will be monitoring pupil progress to see where additional resources or schedule changes might be needed.
- The board of education will have available the trends in pupil performance upon which to make budget decisions and to help in setting priorities.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education does not advocate a specific IMS model for all school districts, but only that schools adopt a system with the features described here.

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